



NEW JERSEY FOLK REVIVAL MUSIC

HISTORY & TRADITION



MICHAEL C. GABRIELE







Jim Albertson Info from Folk Book
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M. Gabriele
downjerseyjim@aol.com

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Down Jersey Archive

Welcome to the (perpetually updating) "Down Jersey Archive" of Smithsonian Institution / Folkways Records recording artist [Jim Albertson](#). Besides "Down Jersey" radio broadcasts, look for vintage concert and festival recordings, videos, interviews, and scans of photos and printed material from Jim's New Jersey music and folklore library.

Click the pictures to access audio, video, or images

Download or order a custom cd of "Down Jersey: Songs and Stories of Southern New Jersey" on Smithsonian Folkways Records [here](#):

Captain o'th' Archive: Jim Albertson
Quartermaster: Joe Kille
downjerseyarchive@gmail.com

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## New Jersey Folk Revival Music

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This book is dedicated to Jim Albertson and Angus Gillespie, two faithful stalwarts and scholars who have given New Jersey a vast musical endowment to be savored for years to come.

Michael C. Gabriele  
*June 1, 2016*

## **That “Down Jersey” Guy**

Radio host, folklorist, musician and one heck of a nice guy, Jim Albertson possesses an abundant wisdom of Garden State roots music. And it’s the “sand in his shoes” that keeps him grounded and gives him his sense of place: “Down Jersey.” A member of the Atlantic City High School class of 1961, he grew up listening to big-band music while working as an usher on Atlantic City’s Steel Pier. He journeyed north and graduated from Montclair State College (University) in 1965 as a speech and theater major. His wife, Nancy McCullough, also a member of the class of 1965, was a home economics major.

Albertson, celebrated in New Jersey folk and folk revival music circles as a performer, teacher, recording artist, author, historian and radio show host, said that a traditional folk song makes references to the lives and situations of common people and has a utilitarian quality, easing the drudgery of repetitive tasks—like sea shanties sung by sailors on tall ships or songs set to the rhythm of a weaver’s loom.

During the early 1960s Albertson tuned into the Greenwich Village scene and the music circulating throughout the Pine Barrens. As a student in the Montclair State Speech and Theater Department, Albertson became immersed in musical productions and worked as a member of the stage crew. After graduating, Albertson felt a gravitational pull that drew him back to the Atlantic City area, but two years later, he and Nancy returned to northern New Jersey when he landed a job as a speech and theater teacher at Madison High School.

Once in Madison, he learned that Drew University was looking for someone to run a coffeehouse for students at the Hayes House facility, located on campus. Albertson made a connection with the Drew administration through one of his students and landed the job, which included free living quarters on the second floor of Hayes House. Through Albertson's outreach efforts, word spread fast about the coffeehouse, which hosted live acoustic music on Friday and Saturday nights. Soon the joint was presenting "name" artists like singer/songwriters Kate McGarrigle, Dave Van Ronk, David Bromberg and Reverend Gary Davis.

In 1972, Albertson received an invitation to a backyard barbecue in Madison where he met Benjamin Franklin ("Tex") Logan Jr., the famous bluegrass long-bow fiddler from Texas. In addition to his musical prowess, Logan was a genius in electronic communications, with degrees from MIT and Columbia. He arrived in New Jersey in 1956 to work as a research mathematician at AT&T Bell Laboratories. Albertson and Logan hit it off quite well at the barbecue and the subject of the Hayes House coffeehouse came up during the conversation. "Well, I'd like to come to this coffeehouse of yours, and I'll bring a few friends with me," Logan told Albertson. Albertson assured Logan he would be more than welcome to visit "any time." In successive weeks, Logan showed up at Hayes House to perform with his friends—two guys named Doc Watson and Bill Monroe.

By the late 1970s, Albertson had returned to southern New Jersey. He and Nancy relocated to Mauricetown on the Maurice River in Cumberland County, and they settled in Millville in the mid-1990s. Albertson phased out his teaching career and became involved in the New Jersey Folklore Society, serving as its president from 1980 to 1982.

It was also during this time that he invited North Carolina folk and country singer Ola Belle Reed (1916–2002) to perform at the New Jersey Folk Festival. They became good friends, and Reed contacted producer Moses Asch of Folkways Records to explore the possibility of recording Albertson. After meeting with Asch in

New York City, Albertson signed a contract and recorded the album *Down Jersey: Songs and Stories of Southern New Jersey*, which was issued in 1985.

Citing Albertson's years of dedication to music and the folk arts, the New Jersey Folk Festival, in 1979, honored him with its Distinguished Contribution to Folk Music of New Jersey Award. Albertson has worked at radio stations in Ocean City and Cape May Courthouse. He got a job as a deejay at WSNJ in Bridgeton, which turned into a ten-year run. In 2010, he began hosting and producing his *Down Jersey* program ([www.wvlt.com/downjersey](http://www.wvlt.com/downjersey)) at WVLT FM ("Crusin'" 92.1) in Vineland, broadcast on Thursdays at 9:00 p.m. He also produces live weekend music programs at Cumberland County College, also located in Vineland.

The *New York Times*, in its March 14, 1985 Metropolitan Report, published an article on the Mine Street Coffeehouse, topped off with a four-column photo of Jim Albertson playing the dulcimer, pictured in the basement of the Second Reformed Church. The story portrayed Mine Street as a nostalgic haven from the 1960s, a time when "people talked about commitment and were enchanted by the sound of a lone guitar." As for the place itself, Mine Street was described as "a dirty subterranean haunt that on weekends is filled with folk music and sentimental echoes of the past. Here is vintage counterculture; three cramped rooms with low narrow-planked ceilings and concrete floors. The plaster skin on the walls is crumbling and, for long stretches, the red brick shows through."

## **New Sound, Grass Fed**

The Garden State, over the last four decades, has been home to New Grass, a vibrant subset of the more established Bluegrass sound. The Bottle Hill Band, founded by Jim Albertson, was an early proponent of New Grass music. Albertson said Hayes House in Madison in early 1970 was the "cradle" of the ensemble, the place where original members first gathered and rehearsed. (Bottle Hill was a district in Madison during the colonial era.) Original members of the band included Albertson as lead singer

and guitarist; vocalist, guitarist, fiddle and banjo player Lew London (Albertson's friend from Philadelphia); hammer dulcimer player and vocalist Walt Michael, a student at Drew; and upright bass player Mike DelaGarza, a student at Madison High School. Albertson said a harmonica player named Davey Burkitt occasionally would sit in on sessions.

The band performed at Hayes House and developed a following. Initially the group's repertoire was built around folk revival tunes but slowly gravitated into the realm of "progressive bluegrass." Albertson credited Michael with guiding the group's move toward bluegrass/new grass, developing compositions with a greater emphasis on improvised solos. Bottle Hill's full New Grass concept blossomed when Albertson brought mandolin player Barry Mitterhoff into the fold. After two years, as the band was gaining traction and establishing its identity, members decided it was time to move to a farmhouse in Bernardsville, which served as their living quarters and rehearsal studio. Albertson, as the only married man of the bunch, had more pressing responsibilities, and there was an amicable parting of ways.

Various band members came and left following Albertson's departure. Bottle Hill recorded two albums and continued performing until the mid-1970s. Albertson expressed pride that the band helped to pioneer new grass and lauded the careers of his friends. London, a recording artist, studio engineer and composer, serves as a teacher and artistic coordinator at CharterTech High School for the Performing Arts in Somers Point. Michael is a teacher, performer and director of the Common Ground on the Hill music program in Westminster, Maryland. DelaGarza became a California filmmaker.

Mitterhoff is best known for his recordings with Hot Tuna and Tony Trischka and Skyline. Mitterhoff and Trischka performed together at the April 30, 2016 New Jersey Folk Festival, where Mitterhoff received the Lifetime Achievement Award.